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A MODERN HISTORY
OF THE KURDS

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Kermanshah as far as Kargavan. But neither he nor the Kalbar chiefs could control these people. Kermanshah remained in disorder well into 1905, as new tribal configurations began to form in the aftermath of Qasr Khan's demise and in the spring Mir Khan lost his region.

Turkey, Russia and Iran's Kurds

Tehran was extremely sensitive concerning Turkish and Russian interests in this part of the country. First there had been Shakh Ushak Akbar's incursions in 1880, which Tehran probably believed required some Ottoman approval. Six years later Lurei Ottoman troops moved at Van and Badkub, creating alarm in Iran. Then, in the late 1890s the Russians began to show greater interest, with the dispatch of missionary interest religious missions to convert the Kurds to Russian orthodoxy.

Istanbul shared Tehran's apprehensions concerning Russian designs. Like Tehran, it feared that Russia was likely to occupy Iranian Azarbaijan. In that case the Porte wanted to ensure it had secured sites of tactical importance along the ill-defined border. But any pre-emptive action had always been inhibited by the fear that it would precipitate Russian intervention. By 1906, however, Turkey felt able to act while Russia was distracted by its humiliating defeat at the hands of Japan and its internal political turmoil. It made a series of minor incursions, laying claim to and then seizing one customs post after another. In May 1906 its troops occupied Margavar and Dasht. In June and October it seized Sardasht and Ushnaviya respectively. Its actions seemed justified first by Russian moves in 1906 to protect its interests in northern Azarbaijan, and then by the Anglo-Russian agreement of 1907 whereby the two Powers delineated Iran into spheres of influence. All Iranian Kurdistan fell within Russia's orbit.²⁷

Kurdish villagers probably captured the general concern, frequently acting as willing hosts for the Turks. For example, in February and April 1906, Shakh Muhammad Isfahy introduced Turkish troops into the Tangovan, Margavar and Dasht valleys, clearing out the customs staff. When they learnt that Iranian forces were on march against them in the spring of 1906, local tribal Kurds appealed to Turkey to the Sultan for protection and the promise was used for Turkish troops to seize high ground west of Urmia, occupying that area in August. By the end of the year the Turkish control in Urmia was rapidly winning the population (including the Shi'i Karapapukli) to apply for Ottoman nationality. In January 1906, Lurei Turkish troops with a large body of Kurds occupied Sar-i-Babai. Kurdish chiefs in the surrounding countryside were summoned before the Turkish commander and reminded that they owed their allegiance to Sultan rather than Shah.

In many cases of incursion Turkish troops did not stay for long, but they left behind them a vacuum in which the tribes were allowed free reign to profit for pasture, inevitably damaging the local economy. Troops and tribes collided in